The art of stone carving in Metaxades, Evros, Greece : an intangible cultural heritage

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5th HERMACONFERENCE
International Conference on Heritage Management
21-23/09/2018

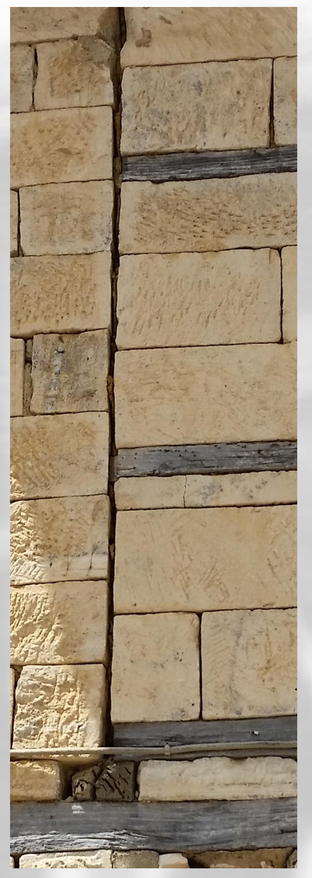
The principles of the investigation for the art of stone carving at the region of Metaxades in Evros, Greece

The research for the preservation and the proposal for the inscription of the *art of stone carving* of Metaxades, a settlement at the prefecture of Evros in Northern Greece, on the national intangible cultural heritage lists, by the Service of Modern Monuments of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace of the Ministry of Culture, initially started as a wider reflection of a concern on the decaying buildings of the traditional settlement and its surroundings.

The working team, a group of preservation and restoration professionals, believed that real protection for buildings and settlements affected by desertification and abandonment is to give new uses and to produce within them creative nuclei of new interests.

The Service of Modern Monuments of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, was directly involved in the process of visiting the settlement, studying its history and the history of the local stone craft, a well-known craft in the wider region and documenting the building stock. The team interviewed the old stone carvers of the region and their descendants, who practice the same profession and gathered information about traditional customs connetcted to the craft.

The team analyzed the characteristics of the area, focusing on scenarios for “branding” the craft of stone carving, in order to secure its presence and evolution.



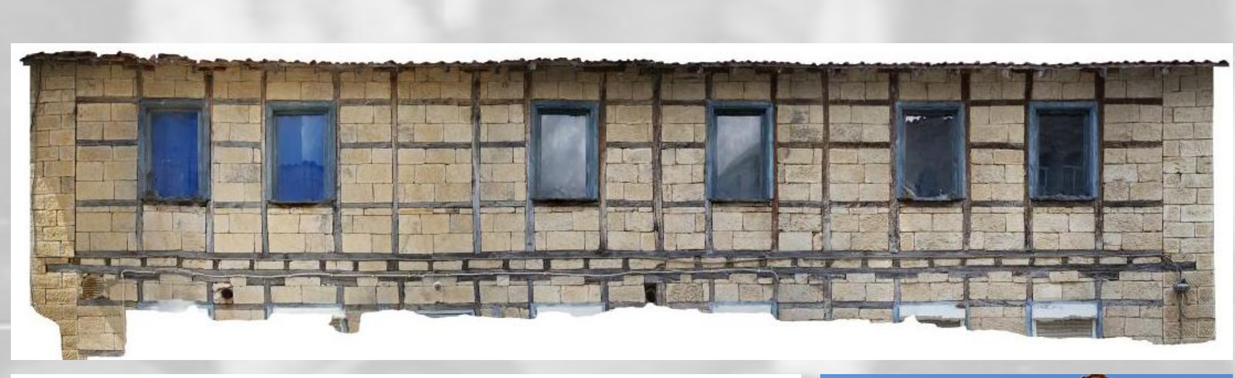
Desription of the proposed craft as an element of intangible culture

The Metaxades' art of stonework refers to the craft of producing a type of perfectly carved local volcanic stones and incorporating them within the local building traditions creating a hybrid and high building technique. Apart from the local stonework seen at the monumental structures of the area (churches, bell towers etc), the same craft is found more often at the masonries of traditional building timber structures.

An important role for the development of the art, played the influence of the highly trained local stone-builders, after their apprenticeship at the neighboring regions of Mandritsa, today in Bulgaria and other places, known as important centers for the building crafts during the 18th and 19th c. Young craftsmen became "dulger[1]" (meaning carpenters) importing the craft of woodworking in the region of Metaxades constructing timber frame buildings.

The important difference in the transfer of expertise knowledge at this region is that the imported building traditions evolved into hybrid structures of a really high architectural and structural value because they incorporated within the wooden constructions the local art of stone carving, filling the structures with the well-carved local soft volcanic stone. This hybrid construction type has been identified, documented and is examined today.

1. Wikipedia: Dülger /dülgər/Etymology από το περσικό درگر (dorgar). IPA(key): [dylɟəɾ] hyphenation: dül·gər.

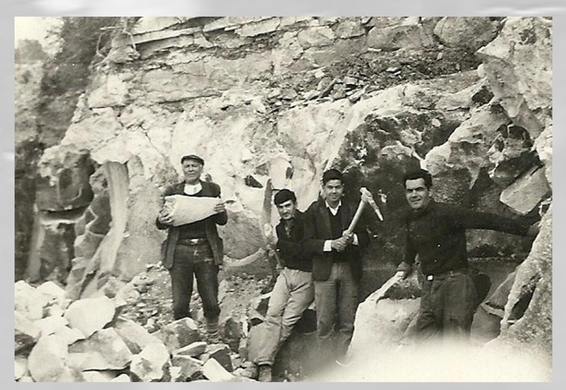


Photogrammetric depiction of a typical upper floor in Metaxades (top) and of a typical early type masonry in Paliouri (below left)
Source: K. Ritzouli, I. Tsetine. Laboratory of Architectural Design and Research III: Morphology and Rhythmology Department of Architecture of the Democritus University of Thrace.

Below right: Front view of a historic monument at Metaxades.

Area where the stonework is found

The significant art of stone of the Metaxades of Evros in Thrace, Greece, is found in some areas of Evros around the homonymous settlement and its surrounding villages: Alepochori, Paliouri, Avdella, and even some other settlements in the neighbouring Bulgaria, around the region of Yvailovgrad. The art of stone carving, as documented today reaches its peak in the late 19th century. It is found both in significant and more humble buildings of the settlements. Oral traditions tend to date the craft of stone carving back at the 17th c.



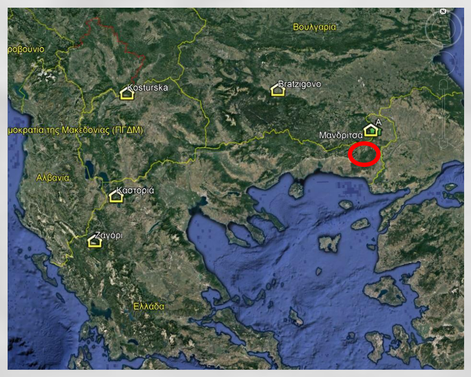
Left: The quarry| Source: http://paliouri-evrou.blogspot.com/2011/05/
Right: Metaxades stonemasons during the 1990s

Measures for preserving the art of stone carving

The most important measure proposed is the diffusion of the history of the particular art, and hence its value, to a wider audience and especially to the younger generations. Thus, specialized technical workshops of traditional art can be organized through the Polytechnic Schools, as is customary in other areas of special architectural interest, in order to teach the particular building art from the old craftsmen, to train the younger.

An equally important measure is the effort to transform the area into a strong cultural spot introducing “place branding” to the area. Through this transformation, the region can be integrated into other relevant cultural networks, both national and transnational, aiming at promoting issues related to the Metaxades' stone art.

Finally, a proposed measure is the recording and characterization as “monuments” by the Ministry of Culture, of a larger part of the residential stock, along with the above initiatives for reviving the area.



Left: A gravestone dipicting a stone mason in 907.
Center: The querries today.
Right: A possible path of building art. Significant hearths of building art 1600 – 1900. The red circle indicates the region of Metaxades.